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Cover image: Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, interior. Photo credits: Lorenzo Saccon
A message from the OUBS President
Lorenzo Saccon (Wolfson College)

This year’s *Byzantinist*, like many other things in our lives, looks different. Our magazine is a great opportunity for Late Antique and Byzantine Studies (LABS) students at Oxford to see their first works published and circulated, and we wanted to encourage this by collecting articles focusing on very specific Late Antique and Byzantine topics. Therefore, this issue will have an increased number of contributions, and we hope you will enjoy reading about LABS students’ favourite patriarch, manuscript, or poem. For those missing the joys of travelling, you should be able to distract yourselves reading about the distaste Byzantines had for any form of trips!

If our newsletter has taken on a new form, the role of the Society has remained the same: to foster a welcoming community of students and scholars, here in Oxford and beyond. When I joined the LABS community, the Society greatly helped me in orientating myself in a new environment, and its members soon became my friends, supporting and accompanying me during these years. For this, and for the incredible work that they have put in placing the Society at the centre of Oxford Late Antique and Byzantine Studies, I have to extend my most sincere thanks to previous committees.

When I took on the role of president, I knew that affairs would have been unusual, although I did not realise to what degree this would have been the case. I knew, however, that the Society would have to increase its efforts to ensure that this community would continue to thrive.

Some of the OUBS’s activities have continued without significant changes. Arriving at Oxford can be a daunting time, especially in the middle of a global pandemic, and the Society eased new students into the LABS programme through its usual Mentoring Scheme and by providing the ‘Welcome Pack’, a helpful tool to find one’s way around academic life.

In addition, despite the difficulties of meeting in person, the Society has continued to bring together members in social events, which have taken place regularly online at the end of each week. These socials serve as an occasion to come together and share our experiences, discuss life in Oxford, or simply enjoy a friendly chat with fellow Byzantinists. While we wait to
meet in person once again, it is important to put all our efforts into maintaining alive the spirit of community that makes the Society one of the most active in Oxford.

The OUBS 23rd International Graduate Conference stands as a testimony of these efforts. It will take place online on 26th–28th February and it will discuss the topic of ‘Self–Representation in Late Antiquity and Byzantium’. The Society has always been proud of the number of speakers joining us from outside Oxford and the United Kingdom, and one of this year’s few consolations was to open our event to an even larger audience online. This year’s theme will be discussed by 36 speakers from 18 different institutions. In addition, we will be joined by two keynote speakers, Professors Cecily Hilsdale and Stratis Papaioannou.

The Conference brings together graduate students with different backgrounds and interests, and I believe that this year’s theme will help showcase the variety and quality of current postgraduate research. In my own research, I consider the enslavement of Byzantines: the experience of slavery is most dehumanising, and information on its victims is often only available through the documents left by the slave drivers. However, studying Late Antiquity and Byzantium through the lens of self–representation offers a diametrically opposed perspective, where the self–fashioned images of Byzantine women and men take centre stage. As the late Cyril Mango wrote in his inaugural address here at Oxford, it is ‘the discovery of [this] true self […] that ought to occupy those of us who pursue this discipline’.

Furthermore, as suggested by the vocabulary of self–representation, this theme can spark an interdisciplinary dialogue, from literature to visual culture, and I am very excited to discover the different ways in which our speakers will engage with it over the three days.

Despite all the difficulties and doubts, the OUBS is looking forward to a great Conference and to many more events and socials in the upcoming weeks. This is evidence of the many strengths of our Society, and I hope it will continue to grow and bolster the community of young researchers in Oxford and across the world.
Poem of the Issue: A. P. VII 307

Translation and commentary by Frederick Bird (Regent’s Park College)

‘THIS IS MY NAME, AND THIS MY NATION…’

‘And why, sir, should I care to know?’

‘OF NOBLE RACE… GOOD REPUTATION…’

‘And what, sir, if it were not so?’

‘… AND HERE I LIE.’ ‘But who are you? And whom, sir, are you talking to?’

Humans have long spent their lives trying to make a name for themselves. This epigram, attributed to the sixth–century Byzantine poet Paul the Silentiary, probes deeper into the desire of the human psyche to be remembered after death.

‘Here I lie.’ The first speaker is deceased but is nevertheless eager to introduce himself. His interlocutor is less eager to listen. The disjointed dialogue that ensues reveals that each party is unwilling to interact on the other’s terms: one is stubbornly proud of his status before death, while the other questions whether the first’s life has any significance now that he is dead. The speech of the first is deliberately interrupted with the second’s interjections. In the translation, I have added the repeated, mockingly respectful ‘sir’ to convey his aloofness.

Let us take one step back and consider this poem in its historical context. Epitymbic epigrams were short metrical inscriptions on tombstones. In Antiquity, the deceased were often buried at the side of the road leading out of town, allowing people to read the inscriptions as they walked past. Some inscriptions were very simple and ‘functional’, declaring only the name of the deceased, but others were polished poems with thought–provoking content. Poets who saw the high literary potential of this genre also composed similar tombstone–poems for literature’s sake which were not inscribed on real tombstones. Over 700 such poems – functional as well as literary – can be
found in the Greek Anthology, an enormous collection of epigrams dating from the seventh century BC to the tenth century AD. The epigram above, from Book 7 of the *Greek Anthology*, is almost certainly purely literary, with the implication that both the tombstone and the passer-by who reads it are imagined.

So who are we as modern-day readers? Although we are neither characters in the poem nor Byzantines reading tombstones by the side of the road, we nevertheless have much in common with the poem’s fictional second speaker, who hears the words of the deceased. Just as he engages in dialogue with the man in the grave, we interact with the words of a dead man – Paul the Silentiary. Thus our separation in time from the poet parallels the second speaker’s separation by death from the first speaker.

The sentiments conveyed in this poem about the inevitability of death are timeless. Thus the fictional speakers in the poem, Paul the Silentiary’s ideal reader’ and we, as the modern audience, are united by our human vulnerability to death. However, Paul goes further still. He pessimistically presents us with the possibility that once our fleeting lives are over, we will soon be forgotten. This strikes a remarkably similar note to the warning in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes that ‘the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten’ (9:5).

Paul’s epigram, like Ecclesiastes, reinforces our perception of humanity’s ephemerality. But, while doing it, it exhorts us to seek an answer to the second speaker’s haunting question: ‘Who are we?’

In the end, it does not matter how long we will be remembered, because we know we shall not be. Nevertheless, we should not stop looking at our own identity and shaping ourselves. So, who are you?
Tiny Shoes and Broken Thumbs: Childhood in Byzantine Egypt.

Tom Alexander (St John’s College)

Life as an infant was fragile. However, this is not so apparent when we look at these red leather toddler’s shoes, now displayed in the Ashmolean Museum. They were excavated in Egypt – the precise site is unknown – and dated to the ‘core period’ of Byzantine control and the initial decades of ‘Umayyad rule, i.e. between the fourth and eighth centuries. Such a good conservation is not surprising; textiles and leatherwork in Egypt are regularly preserved intact. Surviving examples of Byzantine footwear span diverse social contexts and range from the elaborate gilded slippers in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (inv. no. 862–1903) to the utilitarian sandals excavated at the monastery of Deir el-Bakhlit in Upper Egypt, some of which were constructed from scraps of other leather goods. Another example of children’s clothing and footwear is housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It is a Byzantine–era child’s tunic decorated with elaborate tapestry bands depicting stylised figures, probably worn by a child of seven or eight years (inv. no. 27.239). Although plain by comparison to the V&A slippers, the Ashmolean shoes have been dyed red and have a decorative knop formed from the top band. They have wear patterns on the soles, suggesting that these were not simply funerary objects and that some parents in Byzantine Egypt would go to great expense to pamper their children.

Representations of children in Byzantine literature are fleeting, and often heavily stylised; nevertheless, the Egyptian dry climate has preserved some evidence, in the form of papyri, ostraca (sherds of pottery used for writing) and other archaeological material that permits us some degree of access into the everyday experience of individual Byzantine children. Several letters survived from parents
requesting money because they struggled to provide for their children. A more optimistic picture of childhood may come from excavated toys: clay and wooden horse figurines with pierced muzzles for pull-strings (and sometimes wheels) have been excavated throughout Egypt, and Brigitte Pitarakis in *The Material Culture of Childhood in Byzantium* has noted that surviving double-sided gypsum moulds for some of these horse figurines demonstrate that there existed some degree of ‘mass production’ for these toys. However, excavated anthropomorphic dolls – scholars have suggested – were educational tools to prepare girls for adulthood and marriage.

The analysis made by Roger Bagnall and Bruce Frier indicates that almost a third of infants died before their first birthday. Those who survived, at the age of twelve, might pursue an apprenticeship; a fragmentary sixth-century papyrus from Aphrodito listing payments for a tax levy includes a list of various trades including weavers, cloth treaters, shipwrights, toolmakers, leatherworkers, bakers, oilmakers, coppersmiths, clothes repairers, and barbers (*P. Cair. Masp.* II 67147). Children of wealthy families might be sent to nearby cities to be educated to work in administration, but teaching could also be more informal even if schooling sometimes entailed the perils of rigorous discipline and bullying. A biography of Saints Panine and Paneu (probably composed in the sixth/seventh centuries) includes a narrative in which Panine is bullied for his good penmanship. The bully dislocates Panine’s thumbs, saying ‘try to hold the pen now, peasant’ (trans. Jenny Cromwell), but several days later his thumbs are miraculously healed. A striking and no doubt embellished narrative, but one which gives some depth to the experiences of Byzantine education.

Women would be expected to marry earlier than men. Byzantine law at the time of Justinian established the legal age of marriage at 12 for girls and 14 for boys. Marriages at such a young age were not always successful, and a seventh-century *ostracon* from western Thebes concerns a ‘young girl’ (ἡ νεωτέρη υἱόν) who ran away from her husband and sought refuge with a married couple, although we know nothing of her eventual fate.

There is an immediate appeal to these objects and anecdotes, both in their similarities to the experience of childhood today and their perhaps unfamiliar social context. Let us hope that for students in Byzantine Egypt the threat of broken thumbs stayed as stylised literary hyperbole, rather than actual personal experience.
In 525, Bishop Boniface opened the council of Carthage. This council was the first conducted by a Nicene bishop after nearly 100 years of Vandal rule and since the flurry of activity whilst Augustine was bishop of Hippo. Was this a moment of joy and triumph for the Nicene Church in Africa? After nearly 20 years of Vandal-enforced vacancy, Boniface of Carthage, the successor of such famous (and beatified) names as SS. Cyprian and Aurelius, was seen ‘by the obvious power of divine mercy’ to have succeeded in ushering in a new era of peace for the Nicene faith. In fact, Hilderic (523–530), a grandson of the western emperor Valentinian III – probably influenced by his Roman mother Eudocia – sought peace with the Nicene bishops after an apparent loss of enthusiasm for enforcing the faith of the Arian church (as described in explicit detail in Victor of Vita’s History of the Persecution). How better to demonstrate this new era than with a great synod, provocatively convened in the church of St Agileus, which may have been a repurposed Arian basilica?

The council was therefore bound to contain fair measures of both relief and superiority. The recitation of the Nicene Creed marks the high point. Boniface introduced this moment of intense theatre: the ‘true and universal’ Nicene faith by which ‘hearts are cleansed’ is ‘the faith of old, which we faithfully proclaim, and unfold with a most faithful confession’. This growing tricolon of faiths is the ideological climax. Of course, Boniface would not introduce the Creed itself without audience participation: ‘let this faith be read aloud, if it pleases the holy congregation’. ‘It pleases, it pleases indeed!’ the gathered bishops heartily responded.

Following the recitation of the Creed and its anathemas, Boniface asked the bishops to subscribe to the Creed. A discussion followed. The Numidian bishop Ianuarius of Masculitanus inadvertently revealed the trepidation with which the assembled bishops offered their subscriptions:

‘Although the faith, which has sounded with a public reading should by no means escape the notice of the collective, thinking on its salvation, nevertheless … your blessedness orders the faith to be strengthened by the subscriptions of individuals, not now that he might receive as a
security that which he has received many years before with the anticipation of salvation, but that it may stick in [their] hearts.’

This is a guarded thought. Ianuarius began his speech by putting the anti-Arian affirmation in a concessive clause, reliant on a semantic double negative: ‘Although the faith… should by no means escape the notice’ could be rendered more plainly ‘it must be acknowledged’. It is a construction which hardly suggests triumphalism. Besides this, he even provided – though did not endorse – the notion that Boniface was seeking subscriptions as a security (ut firmitatem)! Clearly, Ianuarius felt some danger in signing his name below the Nicene Creed. Although the Nicene Church found itself in a strong position, the changeable nature of Vandal religious policy, and potential for a renewed persecution, had by no means escaped the notice of the assembled clergy.

This provides a first glimpse of the weakened and fearful state of the African Church.

Another occasion further highlights their changed fortunes. One attendee, Felix of Zactarensis, the legate of the primate of Numidia (whose personal absence went not without comment) gave ‘uncountable thanks to the Lord God’ because ‘he bestowed a priest on this holy seat of Carthage’. He also addressed Boniface as ‘papa’. Whilst this may be a simple honorific, or indeed a borrowing of the ordinary Gothic (and probably Vandalic) word for ‘priest’, it is a unique occurrence in the Acts of the council. This honorific recalled the words of Alypius, known best as Augustine’s friend, but also a legate of Numidia at the Council of 419. On the independence of the African Church from Roman oversight, Alypius likewise addressed the then bishop of Carthage, St. Aurelius, as ‘papa’. Felix unwittingly drew a comparison with the glory days of an African Church that did not hesitate to challenge what it saw as Roman overreach.

As recorded in its Acta, much of the rest of the council was concerned with reasserting the power and influence of the Carthaginian see, notably in its relations with the other North African congregations. Recent history has tended to stress continuity between Vandal and Roman rule and has questioned the impact and extent of Vandal persecution. Yet, the Council of 525 shows fundamental changes in the stature of the African Church and the authority of the Carthaginian see. It reveals the impact of the Vandal-enforced interregnum on a Church which would never again stand toe to toe with Rome.
The Manuscript of the Issue: Barocci 131

Alberto Ravani (Exeter College)

A treasure. This comes to my mind while I struggle to describe Barocci 131. Nigel Wilson, who studied this manuscript accurately and knows it better than any other, defined it as ‘one of the most important Byzantine manuscripts in the collections of the Bodleian library’. I raise: it is among the most important Byzantine manuscripts in the world.

More than 140 works occupy the 540 folios of the manuscript, but the total number of authors is even higher since some works are anthologies or other collections. The manuscript hosts many ‘big names’ of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Byzantine literature: Constantine Manasses, John Tzetzes, Michael Choniates and Nikephoros Blemmydes. However, there are many anonymous or unknown authors whose memory depends on the thin pages of Barocci 131. The manuscript is the single testimony to many of the works it contains. All texts and authors were carefully listed by Wilson in the description of the manuscript he published for Jahrbuch der Österreichische Byzantinistik in 1978.

That said, we should not think that the importance of the object ends with the texts it carries. This manuscript is also an extraordinary material artefact. Gathering the texts, coping them, assembling the whole book: this is tremendous effort and cannot be a single man’s work. Borrowing Bianconi’s expression, a miscellany of texts is made by a miscellany of hands. Eight scribes can be identified: Wilson assigned each a letter from A to H. The workload, however, was not evenly divided: hand B, the second hand to appear at f. 42, wrote more than half of the folia. As one may suppose, Barocci 131 was not the one and only manuscript penned by those scribes. Hand B can be found in some sections of Vat. gr. 106; hand A in the Vat. gr. 203; and the scribe responsible for Manasses’ Chronicle (hand E) wrote sections of Vat. gr. 191. All the manuscripts I have just mentioned date to the second half of the thirteenth century, and this provides a dating for our Barocci 131. Internal cues, like the speeches by Manuel Holobolos in ff. 244–250, confirm this dating. Those speeches must have been written after 1261, when Manuel was still a young imperial secretary. In addition, a section of the manuscript contains quotes from the will of Nicephoros Blemmydes, which was made public only after his death in 1272.
We are wrong if we were to assume that the manuscript was created in one go. Different quires were produced at different stages, some of them maybe even in different places. But where was it produced?

Wilson’s hypothesis is utterly fascinating. He thought that a considerable part of the Baroccianus was written in Nicaea around 1250. This entails a production far from ‘the City’, Constantinople, precisely while the very existence of the millenary Empire was at stake. Following Bianconi’s observation, a miscellany is not just a product of the knowledge it collects, but also a ‘creative act’: a miscellany embodies the research itself. But what could the ‘research’ be in the case of this manuscript? What were they researching in Nicaea with this farrago of texts? Well, it is more an endeavour than an act of research. In other words, if this manuscript were produced in Nicaea, it would embody the rescuing and safekeeping of texts which barely survived 1204. It would be a testimony and by-product of one of the darkest times of the Byzantine millennium and an attempt to preserve the fire from those ashes. The very meaning of tradition. Nowadays, a better understanding of the scribes put this hypothesis aside, even if – Bianconi thinks – some parts could still claim Nicaean origins. The evidence, in fact, points towards a scholarly circle active in Constantinople at the beginning of the Palaiologan period and Irigmard Hutter adds that that such an amount of works could have hardly been available at that time outside Constantinople; so, even if some parts are indeed Nicaean, the manuscript was finalised in the reconquered capital. There is more than a possibility that the scholarly circle in question was that of Maximos Planudes, one of the earliest figures of the ‘Palaiologan Renaissance’, but this remains hypothetical.

Unfortunately the romantic view proves false – as, to be fair, it is often the case with romantic stuff. However, no matter its origins, this manuscript has actually preserved over the centuries a number of texts that would have been otherwise unknown. It was probably not created with this purpose, but it found itself a rescuer. A rescuer that can now peacefully rest as one of the many hidden treasures of Oxford’s libraries.
Timothy I (r. 780–823) was one of the most prominent patriarchs of the Church of the East, a community sometimes called ‘Nestorian’. He grew up under Umayyad rule, in the province of Adiabene, on the Nineveh plain in Iraq, a region that still contained a large population of Christians. At the important monastic school of Bashosh, near Mosul, Timothy became familiar with the works of the Church Fathers and Greek philosophers, most notably Aristotle. This region saw, in 750, the dramatic showdown between Umayyad and Abbasid forces, leading to a reorientation of the Islamic world that was to greatly impact Timothy and his church.

Timothy’s election as patriarch is shrouded in controversy. Somewhere in his forties or fifties, he was bishop of the remote mountain parish of Bet Beghash. Although an outsider in the patriarchal election of 780, he managed to win enough support from the electors. Intimidation, bribery and trickery: this is how chroniclers describe it, despite their unanimous positive assessment of his later rule. Instead they justify these tactics as ensuring his election over equally unscrupulous if not more corrupt opponents.

Whatever the truth, many of Timothy’s opponents were left dissatisfied. The cracks of schism emerged. Joseph, metropolitan of Merv, went into open opposition. Joseph appealed to the caliph al–Mahdi, but al–Mahdi ruled in favour of Timothy. This marked the beginning of a relationship that would define Timothy’s reign.

Enthroned in the ancient but largely decaying city of Seleucia–Ctesiphon, Timothy immediately transferred his residence to the new and growing city of Baghdad, to be close to the caliphal court. With the Abbasid translation movement underway, there was already a burgeoning circle of Christian scholars there. Physicians, philosophers, translators, astronomers, and mathematicians, forging the way in translating the classical Greek knowledge, for so long preserved in Syriac, into Arabic for a new audience of Muslim scholars.

Timothy was soon commissioned to translate Aristotle’s philosophical ‘topics’ into Arabic. The method employed was to translate each Syriac word to an Arabic equivalent, and reference the Greek for the original meaning. Timothy seems to have been regarded as something of an expert in
Aristotelian logic at court, providing ready openings for cross-confessional discussion. Timothy recorded one such instance, when he was approached by a young Muslim philosopher, a Mu'tazilite keen to test his knowledge of Aristotelian logic with the patriarch.

‘In what way do you want to converse?’ asked Timothy ‘In the way of debate’, proposed the young man, ‘about God.’

Aristotelian logic provided a common language for Christians and Muslims engage on a theological level.

Not all of Timothy’s responsibilities lay so immediately at hand. The Christians of his church covered a vast region, throughout Syria, Iraq and Persia, down the Persian Gulf to Southern India, and across Central Asia, along the Silk Road, spilling into the nomadic steppe as far as China. Timothy was responsible for selecting and commissioning numerous missionaires, metropolitans and bishops for the most distant reaches of this church. Early on he commissioned David, a monk from Marga, sending him off across the Indian Ocean to become metropolitan in Tang China, and responded to a request from the king of the Qarluqs, newly converted Turkic nomads from the northern steppes beyond the Syr Darya river, for the appointment of a metropolitan. Other new metropolitans were likewise commissioned for Tibet and for the numerous Christians of southern India.

However, it is for a discussion with the caliph al-Mahdi that Timothy is best remembered. In 782, Timothy records how al-Mahdi engaged him in discussion on the major points of contention between their two faiths. Their debate ranged from the divinity of Jesus and the prophethood of Muhammad, to the nature of scripture. Timothy’s tone is deeply respectful. He deploys his Aristotelian logic effectively but cautiously, conceding only that Muhammad ‘walked in the path of the prophets’. While neither is persuaded, both leave with a better understanding of the other, greatly helping their working relationship. The reality of this event, however, recounted in Timothy’s own words, is hard to establish. It was most likely circulated, and has certainly afterwards been used apologetically and to instruct and encourage. But the atmosphere at court was one in which such discussion could have occurred.

This audience between patriarch and caliph was just one of many recorded. Within his first year, Timothy had already had at least six audiences with al-Mahdi, negotiating permission to restore churches destroyed by Muslim governors, a reminder that whatever
openness might be found at court, a very definite power relation existed.

Timothy’s long reign was to be remembered as a golden moment for the Church of the East. Under Timothy the Church expanded across Asia, with some estimating that he oversaw more Christians than the Pope in Rome. By the end of his life, the translation movement too was at its height, with a newly founded library, the House of Wisdom, in Baghdad soon coming under the direction of Hunayn ibn Ishaq, a Syriac Christian. Timothy lived through the reigns of five caliphs, from al-Mahdi to his grandson al-Ma’mun. For all of these it was Timothy’s relations with al-Mahdi that served as a model for their own interactions with the patriarch. But Timothy’s long reign went unrivalled. A succession of shorter reigns, compounded by increasingly antagonistic caliphs, brought steady decline until the arrival of the Mongols.
Byzantium in ... a Netflix Series

Lorenzo Saccon (Wolfson College)

When I read the *Guardian* presenting *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* as ‘the Turkish *Game of Thrones*’, I knew I had to watch it, but I was simply not prepared: five seasons, 448 episodes, more than ten days and twenty–two hours of historical fiction. The curiosity was still too strong, since my research had recently led me to the fascinating world of Turkish historiography, and I had just been able to read – albeit in translation – some of the few pages with all our meagre information on the founder of the Ottoman dynasty. Unlike what some fans clearly believe – at least judging from their Facebook and YouTube comments – *Ertuğrul* is not better than *Game of Thrones* because it portrays real events. Its creator, Mehmed Bozdağ, admitted that there are only four to five pages of historical sources detailing the hero’s life. The ratio is roughly 100 episodes per page.

I was now certain that the TV series was going to be something else. On one hand, screenshots showed some rather fanciful costumes (similar to the ones worn by the soldiers standing guard to Ertuğrul’s tomb today) – and I could only imagine the ‘historical accuracy’ that could be maintained with these premises. On the other hand, I was also fascinated by the reviews praising the positive image of Muslim leaders and the strong female characters; not to mention that this is likely to be the only high–budget TV show on thirteenth century Anatolia. So, I set my Netflix account to 1.5 speed (unfortunately the highest setting) and started from season three. Yeah, to die–hard fans of the series, I must admit: I skipped a lot. Please forgive me if I make mistakes.

First off, it is necessary to admit the difficulties in approaching *Ertuğrul* from a historical point of view. The show never explicitly states when it is set, and contrasting elements confuse even further viewers with some understanding of thirteenth–century Anatolian history.

The Mongol attacks in season two suggest a post–1243 setting, when Constantinople was still in the hands of the Latins, and the western neighbour of the Seljuks was the empire of Nicaea. However, as the plot of *Ertuğrul* moves forward and so advances in time, historical events before and after that point become synchronous: characters who should have been dead at the eve of the Mongol invasion, such as the amir Sa’d al–Din
Köpek (d. 1238), are still around when messengers from the emperor in Constantinople (after 1261?) supposedly reach Ertuğrul.

I was ready to accept some historical inaccuracies, as my main interest was the way in which Byzantines were portrayed in the show but even on this front, Ertuğrul was peculiar. To put it simply, if you were expecting the great debut of Byzantium on the small screen, you will have to keep waiting. It is clear that Byzantines did not receive a great deal of love and attention. For example, if Turkish costumes are not historically accurate, at least they are fascinating. Byzantine soldiers, on the other hand, wear the same clothes as the Templars, namely the stereotypical white robe with a red cross painted on it, and some helmets that would probably fit better in a carnival parade.

However, the characters did catch my attention. Vasilius, the commander of Karacakhisar, might not be the most interesting villain, but he has a lord, Tekfur, with a fascinating name. Nothing is said about this figure, apart from the fact that he is the tekfur (governor) of the Christian castle of Karacakhisar. The name Tekfur, used ‘indiscriminately for everyone from petty lords to the Byzantine Emperor’, frequently appears in Turkish historical narratives dealing with the early Ottoman period, such as the Oxford Anonymous Chronicle and the Histories of Aşıkpaşazade and Neşri.

These are precisely those texts which contain the little we have concerning Ertuğrul’s life (the four or five pages mentioned above), and they have been clearly used extensively in the writing of this show. Although written more than two hundred years after the events – between 1484 and 1495 – all these texts contain recurring elements. In these narratives, Ertuğrul joined the army of the sultan Alaeddin (a legendary figure based on the Seljuq sultan Alā al-Dīn Kayqubād I but often confused with Kayqubād II and Kayqubād III), who gave him a place to settle on in Söğüt, between the lands of the tekfur of Karaca and that of Bilecik, who were already paying tributes to the Seljuks. From there, Ertuğrul engaged in the ghaza, and besieged the castle of Karacahisar together with the sultan Alaeddin. After the ruler was forced to abandon the siege due to a Mongol attack, Ertuğrul was left in command and was able to take the city.

These sources and all their elements, the Mongols, Karaca and Karacakhisar, their tekfur, are ultimately used, very freely, to draw inspiration for Ertuğrul’s narrative. Some of its issues can be traced back to
the confusion that permeates these very texts. Others, however, stem from the tone Ertuğrul sets. Indeed, rather than a normal show, it appears to have the characteristics of a fable, of an epic poem. Surely some of it comes from the quality of the show itself, where characters are often one-dimensional, and one can always tell who is evil from their dark clothes and their exaggerated performance as a raving lunatic.

The heroes, on the other hand, always act righteously: Ertuğrul, upon conquering a bazaar, completely bans the trade of slaves there. This was definitely not the case, as the aforementioned sources confirm. Often, in their praises of ghazi Ertuğrul, they describe his conquests and the slaves he carried away.

Thus, it is clear that Ertuğrul consciously tried to resemble more a tale than a historical account, and this is never clearer than in the character of Bamsi, based on the homonymous hero of the Turkish Book of Dede Korkut, Bamsı Beyrek. Bamsı tells stories to his comrades throughout the series and he is not only creating an embedded narrative, but also making the character of the epic the protagonist of his tales. This is a very interesting idea, and it demonstrates that the aim of the show is to create an ideal world, filled of virtuous men and women, resembling the heroic age of the Oghuz described in the Book of Dede Korkut.

Does this make this series worth eleven days of your life? Probably not. Perhaps spend that time writing strongly worded letters to Netflix for an original series on Late Byzantium.
An Interview with Dr Ine Jacobs, Stavros Niarchos Foundation Associate Professor of Byzantine Archaeology and Visual Culture

James Cogbill (Worcester College)

How did you come to archaeology, especially of the Late Antique and Byzantine variety?

I wanted to become an archaeologist from an early age. When I was nine, there was a lot to do about for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb and I apparently became fascinated by the strangeness of the objects and the culture shown on television and in the papers – or so my parents claim. That being said, I never was particularly attracted to Pharaonic Egypt when studying archaeology at university. Twenty years ago, those courses were all about monumental architecture and big, really difficult names, whereas I was more attracted to the stuff of daily life and everyday concerns in the past.

Prior to coming to Oxford, you were a Chancellor’s Fellow in Classics at Edinburgh. Could you say a little about this role and the University of Edinburgh?

The Chancellor’s Fellowships are wonderful opportunities created a couple of years back and still regularly advertised. They are five-year tenure track fellowships that allow researchers to make a very steady transition from full-time researcher to full-time teaching staff, with the amount of teaching and admin increasing with each year. I only spent one year as a Chancellor’s Fellow in Edinburgh, so my activities outside of teaching were very limited. It was enough to make me acquainted with the concept of tutorials though, which initially was very strange to me. I also remember struggling to understand the many Scottish accents in the first couple of weeks!

How do you approach introducing archaeology and visual culture to students primarily working with textual sources?

It is a continuous challenge! Most of us have a predisposition for one or the other source material, and luckily so or we would all be doing and thinking the same. My approach to the introduction of archaeology and visual culture keeps on evolving. I initially started by replicating what was already in place when I took over from my predecessors, i.e. themed discussion sessions each week. But that approach did not work for me, at all. Throughout the years, I have realized it is more useful to be much more explicit about what archaeology and visual culture is, why and how it was produced, and how it
shaped the lives of peoples past. In addition, I thoroughly enjoy challenging students to re-create such experiences. As well as making explicit how archaeology and visual culture supplement, compliment or contradict textual sources, I discuss not just the material, but also the questions that can be asked of the material. I can get very frustrated when researchers treat archaeological evidence, material or visual culture are merely illustrations to what they consider to be core-business. Or when non-archaeologists assume that ‘digging stuff up’ is easy and something they can do as a hobby to get out of the library. Archaeology is not a skill that can be mastered in a matter of weeks when someone feels like it! In an ideal situation, archaeology and visual culture are of course taught using the material itself, meaning in the field, inside buildings or at least inside a museum, so that it can be experienced rather than looked at. That had been the design for this academic year as well, but that will have to be postponed to a later cohort.

**How do you integrate material and textual evidence in your own research?**

In my research topics, I always try to take a multi- and interdisciplinary approach, one that draws on recent advances in our understanding of literary sources, but is fundamentally based on material evidence. If at all possible, I will try to inspect these first-hand, in situ or in a depot or museum. Although I obviously strongly believe in the originality of the material–evidence approach, it would be counterproductive to ignore the rich textual record of the Late Antique and Byzantine centuries. Yet the topics that I have studied in the past, especially urban development and maintenance in Late Antiquity, had to be largely done using material evidence, as very few contemporary writers were interested in the topic. Of course, there are a couple of notable exceptions like Libanius’ *Oratio* on Antioch, but they mainly pertain to the larger and wealthier cities of the Empire and are far less useful for the smaller settlements that had to make do with much less. One of my current research interests are the seventh and eighth centuries AD, and there is of course a reason that these have been referred to for so long as ‘Dark Ages’. The sources that we do have, like those referring to the Persian and Arab incursions in Asia Minor or in Cyprus, have dominated the debate for much too long and have in fact skewed our view of occupation in these periods. It is very exciting to see how the increasingly independent voice of archaeology is altering our entire perception of this period. I cannot deny that a common theme running through
my research has been to show how archaeology and the study of material culture have the potential to transform debates that have been heavily text-based. I have for instance just published an article that argues for the existence of Christian statuary throughout Late Antiquity. We now assume that Christians were highly suspicious of three-dimensional media, and the vehement protests against ‘idols’ by the Church Fathers have been given a lot of attention. Yet, a careful consideration of all sources – textual, epigraphic and archaeological – would suggest that local Christian communities for a variety of reasons ‘recognised’ their heroes and celebrities, biblical personae and angels in older statues and reliefs.

You are currently field director of the Aphrodisias excavations. Could you say a little to introduce the site to those who haven’t already encountered it?

Aphrodisias is located in the fertile valley of the Morsynos, a tributary of the famous Maeander river in western Turkey. The site has been continuously inhabited from the Chalcolithic Age through to the twentieth century. It reached its largest extent over the course of the first through seventh centuries AD. The current excavations, under the aegis of New York University have been ongoing since 1961. Today, as in the ancient world, the site is famous for the quantity and quality of its marble sculpture. Quarries a few kilometres to the north of the site provided large quantities of white stone, subsequently fashioned into grand architectural and sculptural displays. Though the production of new sculpture decreased in Late Antiquity, the monumental cityscape was curated and maintained far into the sixth century. Aphrodisias for centuries remained a prosperous regional capital, the seat of a provincial governor and a metropolitan bishop, a settlement saturated with the gleaming marble of its illustrious past. Recent research has moreover been focussing on the Byzantine, Beylik, Selçuk and Ottoman phases of the site. Hugh Jeffery, for instance, in 2019 completed a doctorate on the Byzantine centuries of the site, and Miranda Gronow is now focussing on what happens after that. Such research is suggesting that the settlement (under the names of Stavropolis, Karia and Geyre) always remained of importance, well connected and thriving under diverse circumstances. Over the ninth to twelfth centuries, the city re-emerged as a prosperous regional centre. It appears to have remained a central location for some time after the end of Constantinopolitan rule before it was transformed into a smaller village community.
**Notice de voyage. Travelling as a nightmare: Hodoiporikon of Constantine Manasses**

Yan Zaripov (St Hilda’s College)

How do you think a typical Byzantine traveller would describe his trip to the Holy Land? With awe? Excitement? Gratitude? Indeed, these feelings permeate many accounts of Byzantine pilgrims. One of them, called (with false medieval modesty) the *Concise Description of lands and cities from Antioch to Jerusalem, as well as Syria, Phoenicia and holy places around Palestine*, summarizes the trip of John Phokas in the last decades of the twelfth century. It is with untiring enthusiasm that John catalogues all the sights that contribute to the sanctity of the area. John’s narrative, receptive and generally unpretentious, creates an atmosphere of incessant miracle, which fully compensates for any inconveniences of daily life. John’s text is also a guide. It provides detailed directions on how to get from one place to another, some of which include an indication of the exact distance. If the text does not please the audience, says John at the end of his story, it will still serve him as a sweet memory of the holy places.

In complete contrast to John’s description of Palestine as a dream destination stands another twelfth-century account of a trip to the Holy Land, *Hodoiporikon* (itinerary) written in verse by the court poet Constantine Manasses. Unlike John’s pilgrimage, the trip of Manasses can be placed in a particular historical situation. In 1159, the emperor Manuel I Komnenos lost his wife Eirene-Bertha of Sulzbach and, since he still didn’t have a male successor, sought a second marriage. Desiring an alliance against the Islamic polities, Manuel turned his gaze toward the Crusader States. He sent an embassy, with his nephew John Kontostephanos at its head, to Baldwin III of Jerusalem to ask for assistance in choosing a wife. Initially the choice fell on Melisende, the sister of Raymond III of Tripoli. Her relatives prepared a huge dowry, filling several galleys. However, Manuel – or, according to some sources, his envoys – delayed final approval for a year and finally married Maria of Antioch. Some Byzantine historians, explaining Melisende’s rejection, quote a rumour questioning her legitimacy, although the actual reason may be that Manuel was simply more interested in strengthening connections with Antioch.
Manasses accompanied Kontosteph–Ilanos in his embassy. However, he writes not so much a report of a failed diplomatic mission but a personal story of much-troubled wanderings. The text, divided into four books, has a complex narrative structure. Manasses starts with a description of an evening when – having escaped the hassle of daily business – he was reading Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophistae* (*The Dinner Philosophers*). This book was an invaluable source for Byzantine men of letters eager to impress their audience with rare poetic quotations, anecdotes or obsolete words. Despite his affection for antiquarian knowledge (hardly comprehensible to a modern reader), Manasses falls asleep during his studies. He sees in a dream John Kontostephanos preparing a military expedition against Sicily and dragging Manasses by force onto the ship, which suffers a terrible storm. When Manasses wakes up, he experiences (temporary) relief. The same morning he learns that he has to join Kontostephanos’ expedition to Jerusalem and Palestine. Manasses’ reaction is one of absolute stupefaction:

*Having been struck with the news as by a gadfly,*

*I didn’t burst into tears, I didn’t start crying*

*Pouring teardrops from my eyelashes.*

*The terrible news, having reached my ears,*

*Mortifies my soul and freezes my heart.*

*The stream of tears is closed,*

*The wails escape as runaways in full flight,*

*Lamentation is gone, the mouth is speechless.*

The embassy departs from Constantinople: at first things do not look that bad. Manasses gives credit to the beauty of the cities they pass – Nicaea, Iconium, Antioch – without, however, showing much enthusiasm for them. Dismissing Beirut, Sidon (extensively praised by Achilles Tatius!) and Tyre as unworthy of any rhetorical attention, he curses the heat of Ptolemaida, calling on Christ to overshadow the ‘murderous city’. In Samaria, after Manasses has learned from Kontostephanos about the (hitherto secret) mission assigned to the embassy, he sees Melisende, the emperor’s potential bride. For a moment Manasses abandons his grumpiness and gives an ecstatic ekphrasis of Melisende, possibly with a view to recycling his praise later in official orations commemorating the (ultimately frustrated) marriage. Pleased with the fact that Melisende seems to be a good match, Manasses hopes for a prompt return to Constantinople. In vain! The delays with the match’s approval, which Manasses evasively describes in terms of bad weather, made his journey much longer than he had expected. The later narration is replete with
Manasses’ yearning for his beloved City, a leitmotiv that links Manasses’ text with contemporary (and Hellenistic) erotic novels, which narrate the adventures of two lovers separated by storms, pirates and other unfortunate circumstances.

The stay in Samaria is followed by a trip to Jerusalem, with a tour of the holy places. While Manasses has the courtesy to describe – or sometimes just to note – the major landmarks associated with Christ, the apostles and the prophets, the schematic brevity of his account betrays the indifference of a tourist who takes selfies in front of ancient monuments, because he knows that they are important – but does not feel them so. Leaving behind Jerusalem and Bethlehem, Manasses writes an almost blasphemous review of his Holy Land experience. The mask of a pious pilgrim has fallen off.

_I want to speak but tremble once again_  
_(all-seeing eye, do not be angry at me):_  
_I wish I would not see Jericho even in nightmares;_  
_I tried to wash myself in the water of Jordan,_  
_And found out that it was mixed with mud,_  
_Turbid and unsuitable for drinking._  
_Its colour is the colour of milk._  
_Water hardly keeps flowing._  
_One could say that the river’s currents are sleeping._  

_How did this happen, O Christ, the radiance of super–temporal light,_  
_THAT for a long time you dwelled in the places_  
_THAT are dry, stifling, withering and deadly?_  

After the exhausting sightseeing, things got even worse. Manasses fell ill. The degree of detail, with which Manasses describes his symptoms, is not matched by anything in his text. Manasses’ obsessive whining about his corporeal afflictions is not, however, unique in twelfth–century Byzantine literature. His contemporary Theodore Prodromos wrote several epic poems addressed to his disease, along with an account of an unfortunate visit to an incompetent dentist.

As Manasses was half–dead (and perhaps very irritating), Kontostephanos brought him to Cyprus to recover. Although placed in a sanatorium–like environment (he mentions fresh air, baths and doctors whose efforts to cure the disease are nevertheless useless) and entertained by Cyprus’ governor, Manasses perceives his stay as an exile – if not an imprisonment. He unceasingly expresses his longing for the unparalleled splendour of Constantinople, his continued absence from which makes greasy feasts taste like bile. Cursing Cyprus as the land devoid of learning, Manasses mourns his separation from books and his inactivity as a rhetor – a sentiment which will
be familiar to modern scholars suffering from library closures and the cancellation of conferences. To highlight the unsuitability of the provincial island to the refined inhabitant of the Capital, Manasses recounts an unpleasant encounter with a rustic local. On the day of Pentecost, while Manasses was attending a church service, a man entered in the completely packed church and stood next to him. The man (‘Cypriot by origin, in his foolishness surpassing all other Cypriots’) reeked of garlic and wine. Manasses was disgusted with smell and kindly (or so he says) asked his neighbour to step away from him. As the latter had ignored this and another request, the poet resorted to violence: he punched the Cypriot so hard that the sound of strike was discernible even against the backdrop of church singing. Keep your distance!

The frustration, caused by isolation from the cultural world, is aggravated by terrifying experience of dangers. Forced to return to Cyprus for the second time, Manasses became a witness of the Latins’ attack on the island. The count of Tripoli, enraged at his sister’s rejection by the Byzantines, armed the galleys prepared for the transportation of her dowry, and ordered them to plunder without mercy. Amplifying his actual experience, Manasses shares his fear of dangers that, although they did not happen to him, were all around: storms, barbarians on land, and pirates at sea. The tortures of pirates were so horrible that their victim, in Manasses’ view, deserves dispensation from the Last Judgement. Manasses describes his eventual return to Constantinople in terms of a miracle brought about by God (with a little help from Kontostephanos). His escape from the Latins is compared with the prophet Daniel’s salvation from the lions’ den.

The account of Manasses’ journey reads as a new odyssey. Odysseus is kept on an island by enamoured goddess Calypso for seven years; Manasses is absent from home because of a woman in pursuit of marriage. Odysseus relives his adventures with a flashback, during his visit to the island of the Phaeacians: Manasses narrates some parts of his story upon return to Constantinople. Despite these similarities, Manasses is not a Homeric hero. He does not destroy cities in pursuit of glory, instead wishing for himself the life of tranquillity an intellectual deserves. Less adventurous, for sure, but more appealing to his modern readers.